



Progressive Music

#40 ○ €3.00, £2.00, \$3.00

ELP
FOCUS
GENTLE GIANT
LE ORME

45 reviews



Issue #40: 52 pp & contest

Jean Solé



Acid Dragon

September 2005

Issue 40

Dream dealers since 1988

I am French, I live in Lyon and I love UK, especially London. Not only because both words sound alike. I've been there several times since 1974, fascinated by this city. I bought my first prog records there. I saw Caravan, Spock's Beard, Annie Haslam in concert there. I studied English at the university. As you know, I am the editor of this French prog rock magazine written in English, but I sing in English in a prog rock band (Silver Lining) too. UK is my second homeland after France. Thus I'd like to express my deepest sympathy to all our British readers after what happened recently. *We are all Londoners!* Summer 2005 will be remembered for the Live 8 and Pink Floyd's reunion. Thierry

"The only one day I know in life: loving." A. Camus



In Prog We Trust!

ACID DRAGON

Thierry Sportouche, 20 rue ferrandière
69002 Lyon, France (Europe).
phone: (33)4.78.37.37.33.
fax: (33)4.72.37.39.09

New e-mail: acidrag@club-internet.fr
Web pages: <http://perso.club-internet.fr/acidrago/ad2.htm>

Send us your reviews, stories & interviews!
Subscription rates: €16.00 / £10.00 / \$16.00
per 4 issues.

Dépôt légal à parution - Imprimerie spéciale.

In this issue:

- 2 More Murmurs
- 4 Gentle Giant
- 13 Le Orme
- 19 Far from the BT
- 36 ELP
- 44 Focus



Gentle Giant mark 35th anniversary with release of remastered catalogue featuring unreleased material.

"Iconic progressive rock band Gentle Giant will mark the 35th anniversary of their formation with the release of seven of their albums, all re-mastered and re-packaged in a special 35th anniversary edition and containing previously unreleased material. The first two releases scheduled are 'Free Hand' and 'In A Glass House', both due in stores May 10, 2005."

By Phil Jackson

Thus reads the press release on the official Gentle Giant website www.blazemonger.com/GG/

The special jubilee issue of 'Acid Dragon' released in February, 1998 had a special feature on what Christian Staebler described as the 'forgotten' giant. 'How can it be?' asked Christian 'that such a major group in terms of innovation never reached big success like other 'classic rock' groups?

I still refer you to Christian's article for a history of the band but, as a quick reminder and update, will briefly have a chat with John Weathers drummer with the band from 'Octopus' onwards.

Amazingly, I have only two remaining copies of the sadly long since defunct 'Zigzag' magazine, one of them from April, 1975 and, by an amazing coincidence it contained an excellent series of interviews with Gentle Giant including one with John Weathers by Paul Weir, to whom I am indebted to providing me with some background and a darned good read!

You joined Gentle Giant replacing Malcolm Mortimer for the 'Octopus' album I believe. Many people cite 'Octopus' as the best Gentle Giant album. How do you assess it now?

JW 'Octopus' was the first album that I recorded with the band and so has a very special place in my heart. It was recorded at Advision studios in July/August 1972.

I had joined the band in mid March on a temporary basis as Malcolm Mortimore had been involved in a motorcycle accident and was unable play on a British tour that the band had lined up, in that hectic four months we had rehearsed the existing set, toured Britain, toured Germany and then rehearsed the songs for the new album, a very busy time indeed.

By this time I had been offered the job on a permanent basis, which made me not only very happy but also very relaxed in that I had become part of the band rather than a salaried sideman.

The new material also gave me the opportunity to put my own stamp on things, I feel that I was more of a 'Rock' drummer than my predecessors and during rehearsals for the album we had discussed at length the advantages of keeping a straight four rhythm underneath the complicated phrases that had been written, we all agreed that it worked.

Also the engineer, Martin Rushent, was a real little gem. He put his heart and soul into the job and came up with as many ideas as the rest of us, the album was a lot of fun to make.

The recording technique used by the band was also new to me. It was achieved by a layering process. On the basic track we recorded as a four piece with the drums facing the other players. Ray was directing operations mostly with a nod of his head but sometimes with crazed expressions that I later came to know and understand. Once the drum track was given the seal of approval I was given a rest while the master bass track was put down, guitar and keyboard overdubs were done as the opportunity arose.

Normal procedure at that time was to try and get two basic tracks (drums and bass) done each day for the first few days until we had at least six 'in the can', then the pressure was off and we were able to spend time getting the appropriate guitar or keyboard sound for each particular track. It was always a democratic process with everyone in the band given the opportunity to voice their opinion on what sound would suit, but as a rule Ray had such good ears that when he turned round from the console and asked "what do you think?" the answer would inevitably be "great," and that would be that.

On the whole I think that the album has a lot going for it, a great mixture of songs, from the musical madness of 'The Boys In The Band' to the poignancy of 'Think Of Me With Kindness', from the mathematical "Knots," to the mediaeval "Raconteur Troubadour." The overall sound is very rich mainly due to the time and effort put in by Martin; he was tireless in the quest for sound quality and balance. I believe that this album still has something for everyone, a great melting pot of styles and one I will always enjoy listening to.

Going back a bit in time. You played with people like Graham Bond and Pete Brown before joining Gentle Giant. How did it come about you coming into such a band and how did you cope with the rather eclectic nature of the music?

JW I had first met the Shulman brothers back in the sixties when The Eyes of Blue supported Simon Dupree and The Big Sound in a local dance hall and had got on well with them Ray in particular, who came to an Eyes of Blue gig in Portsmouth and hung out with us. Then some years later I was playing at a London college with Graham Bond and ran into Ray and Gary who were playing with Giant in another room. They watched our set, and then I went to watch theirs, so the rapport between us had been re-established.


Eighteen months later, right out of the blue I got a phone call from Ray. He wanted to know if I was prepared to come down to Portsmouth to do an audition for Gentle Giant, the band's drummer had broken an arm and a leg in a motorcycle accident and was unable to play on the tour the band were about to embark on, he didn't say whether the gig was permanent or not, but I decided to give it a

go, after all they were old mates of mine, and a damn good band.

By the time I had joined Giant I had already been 'through the mill' as it were musically. The Eyes of Blue were early exponents of what is now called 'progressive' music, so much so that Yes, in their early days, were frequently to be seen at our gigs taking notes. Eyes of Blue had moved from Soul music into 'West Coast', playing covers from Spirit, Moby Grape and The Doors etc, and then on to writing a lot of our own material which incorporated all the styles we could muster. You must not forget that at this time (67 / 68), experimentation in music was the watchword and that era was the spawning ground of all the great bands that emerged in the seventies. I remember well being on the same bill as Pink Floyd in 1968, they were awful, awful, awful, awful, but they had a great liquid light show, and with everybody in the audience stoned on pot and pills, went down a storm.

Pete Brown's band Piblokto were also fairly experimental, but more in a Jazz / Rock kind of way whereas the magnificent Graham Bond was the epitome of Blues, Funk and Bebop with Classical overtones, playing in Bond's band was a real learning curve for me, he just oozed tempo and feel, a real musical genius. Immediately prior to Giant I had been with Grease band where I was required to play quite minimally, 'laying it down', I believe it's called, and being a great fan of Al Jackson, Booker T's drummer, I was only too happy to comply.

So there you have it. Gentle Giant came up with lots of complex arrangements, but I was not fazed as such by any of them, I regarded it as a challenge, another part of the learning curve I mentioned earlier. It meant I had to sit down and really work at it, something I really enjoyed doing, especially in the company of such good players who covered a whole gamut of styles in their writing. I was a very happy man.

 My memory may be playing tricks on me but I seem to remember in the seventies Gentle Giant live at Dundee's Caird Hall and the band taking turns to play various instruments? You were all pretty versatile musicians as I remember?

JW No, your memory serves you well, we played Dundee on November 19th 1972 supporting The Groundhogs as part of a nationwide tour, I seem to remember that Stray were also on the bill. Strange tour that one.

As far as the multi-instrumentation is concerned, yes, it was one of the main features of the bands performance. Ray played bass, violin and trumpet, Phil played tenor sax and trumpet, Derek played bass and alto sax, and Kerry played keyboards, cello and vibraphone and all were pretty adept at percussion. So we were able to have within the band both a brass and string section, which made live performance far more interesting for the audience with all the changing of instruments taking place.


As time went on we developed this concept even further, incorporating things like a four-piece recorder section and a five-piece xylophone and glockenspiel section. I was only too happy to join in and ended up playing vibes, glockenspiel, guitar and even keyboards at one point, it was a lot of fun.

Talking about instruments, one of my best memories is of the time that we opened for Focus in a refurbished old vaudeville theatre. It still had the original

Wurlitzer organ in working condition. There was a huge organ loft that contained real instruments all driven via an air pump, there were even a bass drum, snare and cymbals all air driven and operated by the four keyboards of this mighty beast.

I insisted that we use it in the show, and after much cajoling Kerry agreed. I can see it now, half way through the show during the blackout at the end of the previous song, Kerry scuttled into the pit and was next seen in a spotlight rising out of the floor playing the intro to 'As Old As You're Young'. It sounded wonderful, and when the spot went out to enable him to get back onstage the roar from the audience was deafening, I was almost in tears, a truly wonderful moment.

I must add that we weren't trying to upstage Focus and did ask them if they minded us using the organ in our show, they were as gracious as ever and said we could do whatever we wanted to.

 Moving onto 'In A Glass House', one of my personal favourites. What are your memories of that? Do you ever listen to the music now?

JW We were under a great deal of pressure at that particular time. Phil had quit the band in Italy in mid January leaving a huge gap not only in live performance but more importantly the writing side. After he left we had very little time to get organised for the second American tour in March of 1973 and suffered a knock-on effect in that there had been very little writing and rehearsal time for the next album.

There was however a different feeling within the band, Phil had been very much the patriarch, he was ten years older than the rest of us and tended at times to treat us like naughty schoolboys, which didn't go down too well I can tell you. So we were still in a kind of euphoric state when we got into the studio, we had proved that there was life after Phil, and the atmosphere within the band was much improved.

I don't quite remember exactly how much we had ready, but I do know that quite a lot had to be done whilst working in the studio, poor Derek for instance had to come up with lyrics pretty well on the spot, but working under pressure didn't seem to affect the writing too much, it was a problem we had to live with.

A particular high point was recording 'An Inmates Lullaby'. Once again Kerry turned up clutching sheets of manuscript paper and proceeded to perform the whole thing himself, it was breathtaking for a common or garden rock drummer like me to watch a real "percussionist" at work, I love that track.

As far as listening to it now is concerned, well obviously with the new anniversary re-masters coming out I've

STORIA DI UN MINUTO
A comprehensive guide to
the Italian progressive rock
of the 70's



Our bestseller guide still available!
Order it now! 5 euros (P&P incl.)

been listening to the results, but usually about once a year I'll have a 'Giant day' where I'll sit down on my own with a few beers and have a quiet reminiscing session, that, I really enjoy.

I think your own influence on 'The Power and the Glory' was massive. It's nice to hear the band really rocking like they did on the first album for which I still have a large soft spot! It's often commented on the material was written very much with Watergate in mind- is this so? Any comment on your own contribution to that album?

JW The timing of the Watergate scandal was just a happy coincidence, happy for us anyway. The album's concept, that ultimate power inevitably corrupts, was planned long before the shady dealings in America came to light. In fact I think it was Phil who had come up with the original idea, but it had been shelved because of the amount of work involved in the planning.

Unlike 'In A Glass House' where everything seemed to have been done in a hurry, there was a lot more time spent in preparation, even though the touring schedule was pretty hectic.

In America we were beginning to get a lot of very positive reaction despite Columbia records refusal to release 'Glass House' and the resulting lack of publicity. The band was in great shape both musically and mentally and very eager to get back into the studio. Another great boost came when we discovered that 'Glass House' was doing very good business on import, Columbia had shot themselves in the foot and would be made to pay for their lack of faith.

We had set aside a couple of months to spend on 'The Power and the Glory', so the atmosphere was very relaxed, plenty of time to get everything the way we wanted it and even time to rehearse the tunes properly before going into the studio, that for us was a luxury.

It was also the first album on which had I the opportunity to do some vocals, which I enjoyed immensely.

I must mention here though the recording of 'Aspirations'. We had been trying for most of the afternoon to get the right feel and were getting nowhere; it kept sounding too contrived, so in true British fashion we all went down to the pub. After a few beers we went back to the studio, turned all the lights down and played it as live. It worked, the only overdub was a little bit of guitar, you can actually hear the atmosphere in the take, and it's one of my all time favourites.

So with so many positives and no negatives at all we were all happy bunnies and I think that the album reflects that feeling.

To illustrate the point, just listen to the violin solo on 'The Face'. Ray loses his place (which was totally unlike him), stops playing four bars short, and then shouts "oh no," when he realises what he's done, it was so funny that we insisted on keeping it in.

'Free Hand' is reckoned to be the band's last great album and many numbers on it became Giant standards- any recollections or thoughts on this album?

JW We were a little disappointed that 'The Power and the Glory' hadn't done quite as well as we thought it would, musically it had been a pretty strong

album and I suppose that we were being a little naive in expecting to become an overnight success with it, but at that time a lot of bands were doing just that.

Meanwhile, problems with our management company started to surface, something that we really didn't need at that time, we just wanted to play, and not have to worry about all that business nonsense.

Eventually the company began to disintegrate and we were forced to seek new management and record company, it cost us a bloody fortune.

But now our hands were free, as the song says, and we went into the studio knowing that we were at last in control.

The touring was going great guns, headlining in Canada, Europe and quite a few places in America. The live shows were never, ever a problem.

So it was back into Advision studios for album number seven.

Again the mood was buoyant, we had a clutch of strong songs, a recently refurbished state of the art studio to work in, and Chrysalis Records and management 100% behind us, we couldn't fail, or so it seemed at the time.

Recording the album was a breeze, we were well rehearsed and there were only seven songs to do, six for me actually. The other one was 'Talybont' which had been written for possible inclusion in a movie about Robin Hood, it never made it into the movie, but the demo was so good that we decided to replicate it in the studio and include it on the album. The title comes from a village in Wales where our engineer Gary Martin was living at the time; I used to give him a lift back in my ancient Volkswagen beetle which leaked water like a sieve, if it rained the poor man would be bailing out all the way down the M4.

The album turned out pretty well and with touring and the fresh impetus from new management made it to #26 in the Billboard chart and sold very well in the rest of the world.

As far as it being the last great album is concerned I feel I must disagree with that premise, there was a lot more good stuff to come, albeit disjointedly. By that I mean good songs, but not all on the same album.

I'm a rock drummer, and personally I really like 'Civilian'.

As the tide turned against prog rock Gentle Giant were no exception in simplifying their sound and subsequent albums have not been well received by critics. Even now prog rock writers comment on this? How do you evaluate them now? Should Giant have stopped in 1975 or did any good come out of it?

JW Good question. You're right about prog becoming a little more simplified, I think most of the prog



bands were headed that way, just look at what Yes and Genesis were doing, the hit single in America was 'The Holy Grail', the golden key to success, there was a feeling that once that was achieved, then it would naturally follow that your audience would buy your back catalogue and it would be far easier to get them to listen to the more adventurous stuff.

The main problem lay with the big record companies and centred on greed, they weren't willing to spend money building up a band any more, they expected 'product', something that would be an instant hit and make them loads of money, the accountants were in charge even though they knew nothing at all about music, the business they were supposed to be in!

Then came the advent of Punk and New Wave. There was total chaos. Everybody in the record industry was running round like a headless chicken, trying to predict what was going to be the next 'big thing'. Executives were being fired left, right and centre, it was a well-known fact that one company had fired every single promotion man they had and replaced them overnight. They were truly bad times, especially if you were a middle order band like us.

So, we started to follow suit, we didn't have much choice. We recorded 'Interview', which was purposely a little more 'accessible' but still included 'Design', a Minnear percussion classic, to show what we were capable of. But the headless chicken syndrome was rubbing off on us. 'Interview' lacked direction and wasn't very well received at all.

Live concerts though, were going amazingly well, that's why we decided to put out the live album, as well as the fact that it gave us the chance to decide where we were going musically.

The truth of the matter is, we went the wrong way. We chose to make the next album 'The Missing Piece' even more accessible, digging an ever-deepening hole for ourselves..... it got deeper. 'Giant for a Day', still no real direction, a total mishmash, but I love 'Spooky Boogie'.

So, should we have stopped in 1975? I think not, there's plenty of really good stuff recorded long after that.

You went on to join Man in 1983 I believe- what did you do in the intervening years? How long did you stay with Man? And what did you do after Man?

JW Well, the demise of Giant came as a bit of a shock I must admit, I was keen to carry on with Gary and Ray but they decided to have a go at the 'Shout' project with just the two of them.

I became a bit of a recluse, growing vegetables and generally mooching around, just playing with local bands.

It was only two years later that I was asked to join Man, who had been persuaded to reform by a London agency, that two years had passed very quickly



but by then I was ready to go back to full scale touring and recording. I spent the next thirteen years with the band apart from a six month period in 1990 when Terry Williams their former drummer did a couple of tours, an 'Original Man' kind of thing. I also started doing session work for the Welsh T.V station H.T.V, quiz shows, chat shows, and music shows. I parted company with Man in 1996 and was offered a job with a Welsh language theatre company and after two years took over as Musical Director until 2002 when I was diagnosed with a degenerative neurological condition akin to M.S, which affects the lower half of my body, making it impossible to play drums any more. Although I don't play anymore I'm still involved with Gary and Kerry on various projects, musical and otherwise, and I'm enjoying myself.

Gentle Giant have had a big influence on newer prog rock bands like Echolyn and Spock's Beard. Are you or others in Gentle Giant familiar with the renaissance in prog rock that has seen so many young bands choosing a more challenging musical route?

JW I'm ashamed to say that I'm not familiar at all with any of the nouveau prog bands, I don't pay a great deal of attention to what's going on although I suppose I should. But I find that there's too much dross out there to wade through, the likes of Cold play and U2 do absolutely nothing for me, but then again I'm in the minority so I must be wrong. (So am I! Phil)

The concept though of young players being so uncomfortable following popular trends in music that they hark back to the innovative writing and playing of 30 years ago gladdens my heart. It means that there is a new generation of people out there that are interested in really learning to play to the best of their ability, taking up the challenge of playing something interesting and difficult, pushing themselves to the limit. People who can play their instruments, not just a three - chord trick with a massive publicity machine behind it, are coming back to the fore and I heartily applaud them.

What are your overall thoughts looking back on your musical career and what are your (and Gentle Giant's) current plans?

JW Well sir, I think one word will suffice, FORTUNATE. I lived through impoverished times as a kid then I moved to Liverpool just as the Beatles were emerging and the city was a hotbed of music, almost everyone I knew played, a perfect training ground.

I moved back to Wales and because of the Liverpool connection got a job in the best local band straight away. From there into one of the best bands in Wales and on to several other great bands, the whole thing gathering momentum all the time.

From joining my first band to touring America with Giant took only 8 years, hardly any time at all, and I loved America. But most of all I feel fortunate that I got to perform with some of the greatest musicians of the Rock era, lovely people who taught me all that I know and to whom I owe everything.

I've been a rocker, a mod, and a hippy. Through music I've been able to live a very fulfilling life, and I don't regret one minute of it, I've been a very lucky man.

ACID DRAGON #40

As to the future, my days behind a drum kit are over but as I've said there are ongoing projects with Kerry and Gary. Ray and Derek do keep in touch but I'm pretty sure that there won't be a reunion as such; Ray has already said that Gentle Giant is 'in his past' and he's not interested. But I do have great hopes of recording some more with Kerry and Gary because although I can't physically play, with modern technology I'm able to sample my own drum kit and play it with a keyboard which I think is quite 'Kosher' so we'll have to see.

Thanks John for your very detailed, interesting and comprehensive answers. I really appreciate the time you've put into this interview. (It's sad to think that music lovers can't hear the drumming of John Weathers now and I sincerely hope we haven't heard the last of John or the Giant and that John's aspiration to record again one day is realised).



Guitar Workshop September 12th to 17th 2005 in Paris with Frédéric L'épée

The aim of this workshop is to temporarily get rid of usual musical principles and styles in order to explore sonorities which potentially lies in western culture but we don't actually use.

Who may attend this workshop :

Those who already have some experience with guitar and who wish to acquire a deeper knowledge of modes as well as discovering unusual rhythmic forms.

What it will be about :

- Intensive work (4 hours a day during 5 days) on modes descended from western basic scales.
- Creation of small pieces and melodic improvisations in those various modes.
- Working on rhythmic combinations, and introduction to symmetrical rhythms (5 - 7 - 9 - 11 and so on...).
- Some specific techniques like up and down strokes pick techniques, crosspicking...
- High spirits and motivation.

What it will not be about :

- Learning to play guitar.
- Original modes which would nevertheless be accessible through practised modes, modes with chromatic constituents.
- Working on an existing repertoire.
- Jamming.
- General technique.

How, where and when :

Sessions will be collective and will take place in Paris from Monday, September 12th to Friday 17th from 2pm. to 4pm. a public demonstration of the workshop will be performed on next Saturday or Sunday.

Personal meetings with Frédéric L'épée will be possible in order to fix some theoretical or technique specific problems.

Fee :

The price of the workshop is 250 euros, housing and food are of the participants' charge.

Inquiries :

You can get further information at :
<http://www.stapodol.com/cagele.net/workshop.html>
<http://www.stapodol.com/cagele.net/index.htm>
or send an email to stapodol@cagele.net
or phone to :
+33 (0)1 42 35 49 11